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ABSTRACT

In the Philippines, school children must contend with the use of English and Pilipino as media of instruction. Since they are taught by teachers who have not mastered English, either, the result is predictable: rote learning. In this process, pupils also learn the hierarchical authority structure of the school system, that is, the rules governing school behavior, and teachers' prejudices. They do so without deliberate instruction in such matters. This is illustrated in an observation of a class in social studies in a Philippine rural school. Filipino school children carry a heavy linguistic burden and adjust to the subcultures that the languages they study and speak in home and community reflect. Their plight resembles that of disadvantaged groups in other societies whose home language and culture differ from those of the dominant groups. Linguists are beginning to address themselves to the problems of such groups, taking account of their difficulties in learning an alien language and in accommodating themselves to a dominant culture. (Author)

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THE LANGUAGE OF THE SCHOOL

Priscila S. Manalang

Like Marxism in its various contemporary versions, formal education today seems to have taken on the characteristics of a religion. It has a mythology and some doctrines; it is replete with ceremonies and rituals; it has spawned monolithic bureaucracies in many a case; its disciples have a zealous sense of mission and, not least, it has a language. Since the acceleration of industrial development and the concomitant secularization of intellectual perspective, education seems to have replaced religion as the dispenser of the key to salvation - from poverty, hunger, illness - both mental and physical, excessive population growth, social maladjustment, labor-management conflicts, marital and family problems, drug dependence, sexual problems - the solutions offered fluctuate between suppression or sublimation and the new permissiveness. Education purports to offer a solution to almost every conceivable human affliction. That it is frequently confused with training is no surprise, for the utilitarian purpose of schooling frequently outweighs other objectives.

The form in which education has spread all over the world and with which it is still identified bears the imprint of its provenance: age-graded schools, the lecture cum regurgitation technique, classes with many students instead of expensive tutorials, pre-established curricula, tests, grades and credentials. These features, along with a bureaucratic superstructure, were unknown in Philippine society in its pristine, and perhaps happier, state.

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In defense of its missionaries, it must be mentioned that they sincerely believe in the power of education, not only to change behavior and resolve all kinds of problems, but also to transform underlying attitudes and values. Every state has a formal expression of what qualities it wants its citizens to have, and enjoins the school to inculcate them, whether they be social, moral or intellectual in nature. It is no secret that instruction in history is generally slanted toward national self-glorification. This has resulted in different interpretations of the same set of historical facts. Perhaps this is also why curriculum planners have turned to the eclectic social studies - the dialogue between the historian and his facts can be as instrumental in instilling patriotism as in evoking distaste and even alienation.

This belief in the power of education to transform attitudes and values must be maintained; otherwise the schools might lose their clients to institutions which lay no claim to teaching anything but skills and pertinent knowledge. In this connection it has become useful recently to include the idea that, as process and product, education contributes to national development.

Such faith must surely be grounded in something other than metaphysical. Scores of empirical studies affirm the positive correlation between the level of formal education attained and income. At the very least this suggests that schooling can be a channel of entry to a higher socio-economic status, provided that its requirements do not restrict it to a particular social class. However, there is increasing evidence that Philippine schooling benefits those social classes who already enjoy the special advantages that formal education is supposed to yield.

More germane to the theme of this conference is the fact that in the process of dissemination formal education has developed a particular language which has affected discourse in the classroom.

Current bilingual policy envisions Filipino as the emerging language of instruction, with English increasingly relegated to the status of a separate subject in the curriculum. Thus English, at least for the foreseeable future, will be used to teach mathematics and science, while Filipino is to serve as the medium of instruction in the other subjects.

There are a few remarkable observations on this policy that seem pertinent:

1. The direction of language policy is a result of multiple factors: regional politics, economic and political goals, vested interests and even international relations.
2. Abrupt changes in language policy, however sound, do not allow sufficient time for the development of instructional materials nor for the adequate retraining of teachers.

   Thus we have the paradox of college students asking questions in sophisticated Filipino and elderly professors answering haltingly in what is supposed to be their national language.
3. The distinction in the prescribed medium of instruction for the different subjects implies, first, that Filipino is not yet adequate for teaching science and mathematics and second, that it can be used to instruct in what academicians call the "soft" subjects. Such a dichotomy is actually a slur on Filipino, for no language is inadequate in the sense that it codifies surrounding

reality. If that reality includes the objects and meanings of science and mathematics, then Filipino, or any other language for that matter, could be used to teach these subjects. Hence the decision to draw this distinction is probably based on practical considerations rather than on the "naturally" restricted code of Filipino. In any case, the development of Filipino in a sophisticated discipline is the logical function of the practitioners and experts of that discipline, not of any formal organization devoted to contriving words and phrases deemed equivalent to foreign technical terms.

4. Whether or not we eventually adopt Filipino as the medium of instruction in all levels of schooling, it is submitted that the present policy of bilingual simplification will create more complexities for students, particularly the poor, disadvantaged majority.

Given the fact that for most rural or urban poor pupils, standard Filipino, whatever it comes to mean, would in effect be a foreign language, there is no escape from teaching it as such. But the pedagogy of second language teaching does not appear sufficient to bridge the gap between the language of the home and that of the school. To put it differently, learning pursued this way is not likely to give the child a unified outlook on the world: his world. The child may learn to compartmentalize, to distinguish between the reality of home and community and the "reality" of school in terms of their respective languages. The question of which reality is more real will probably beset him sooner or later.

Schooling, which comprises only one part of his life, may come to mean a highly artificial, contrived atmosphere in which he is made to learn certain verbal skills that bear no relation to life beyond the walls of the school. He is also likely to develop the notion that the language of the school is the superior medium. Perhaps this is indeed the case, given that parents send their children to school "para may matutuhan naman sila." (So that they will learn.) Not infrequently parental attitudes reinforce this implicit ethnocentricity of the school system.

The failure to recognize the sociolinguistic system of the child as a respectable code in its own right, replete with indigenous nuances, subtleties and a flavor impossible to translate into a more "respectable" tongue, accounts for the dismal results of so-called compensatory education efforts for disadvantaged children. The fact is - continuity between home, community and school in terms of linguistic communication logically includes more than language alone: it involves attitudinal sets and values, patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving which are different, contradictory, or mutually exclusive. As the studies of Henry suggest, even in a monolingual situation, the disparities in subcultures are present, resulting in preferential evaluations of one sociolinguistic system over another, or in the imposition and learning of one at the expense of the other. When, in addition, educators develop their own language and transpose it to the classroom the linguistic burden of the learner is bound to increase.

Some examples of the changing and consequently bewildering language of education follow, to show that some ideas are recurrent and others mere accommodations of popular trends or higher prescriptive powers. Since this is not a philosophical treatise, distinctions between the definitions, metaphors and slogans of education will be ignored.

The following is the subtitle of a paper on a departmental report concerning a five-year development plan: "The Department in Relation to the Human Resource Output of the College." Why not the kinds of graduates? Why human resource output, a term that de-personalizes the graduates even as it apes the popular but hardly aesthetic language of economic planners.

A guide on population education, which is topical and relates to a global problem, states that it "is made up of four main parts: the objectives, the content outline, a brief description of a suggested methodology or approach called strategy and an overview." Please note that purpose is simpler than objective, that strategy is a military term and that an overview might as easily be architectural in meaning. The tendency of educationists to borrow terms is not only disquieting, but confusing. One of the newest terms is the "module", an engineering concept suggesting the self-contained parts of a machine or the part by part approach in constructing a building.

Another position paper includes the following excerpts: "The inputs into this paper were drawn from the concept papers etc." "For purposes . . . of delineating areas of responsibility and taking cognizance of the allocation and distribution of roles among the specialized agencies of our government and society, it would be prudent for us, engaged in the business of education . . . . ."

Here we are repeatedly confronted with the language of economists and managers. To refer to the "materials and ideas used in the paper" instead of "inputs", seems a more straightforward way of presentation, as is the "assignment of work" instead of "allocation and distribution of roles." And alas for the admission that education is a business!

Finally there is a candid admission that educational administration is synonymous with management, defined as a discipline, a career, a profession, and conceived as a process, as an occupation requiring a set of conceptual, technical and human relations skills. In the literature of management it is rarely, if ever, mentioned that management is essentially the manipulation of people and objects to attain certain predefined ends. The people component is to be managed through human relations skills, a euphemistic phrase for what is in fact their assignment to work that is presumably rational, i.e., economical, involving the least expenditure of time, money and effort.

Educators are also prone to pick up sociological and psychological jargon, the profession having been subjected to the influence of the latter for decades. Thus learning objectives must be absolutely behavioral so that they can be measured. It seems germane to ask: how are good citizenship, tax consciousness, self-discipline and all the values by which educators and policy makers set such great store to be measured? The problem becomes more difficult because of the limited time the learner spends in school, and the impracticability of following up his life career. It is in times of crisis and uncertainty when the effects of education in values may be ascertained to some degree. And even then, schools may not take sole credit, for the family, the church, the peer and work group, and the community would have also figured significantly in such education.

Learning objectives are now classified into the cognitive, the affective and the psychomotor, instead of the less pretentious ones of knowledge, skills and attitudes. A favorite suggestion of educators is that something considered desirable should be "institutionalized", when it is simpler to say that it should become a regular procedure or part of an existing organization.

Even policy-recommending bodies are not immune from the temptation to use words and phrases lifted from prestigious disciplines. One general aim of education is stated thus:

> "a. Provide for a broad general education that will assist each individual, in the peculiar ecology of his own society to . . . ."

Since ecology is a biological term which is not familiar to most readers, perhaps it would have been more effective to use "the peculiar or unique conditions of his society."

How does all this seep to the classroom?

In the first place a teacher embodies not only the general culture of her society, but also the subculture of her profession. If she grew up in a rural community, its local culture would also be part of her repertoire of patterned responses.

Over and above this there is the subculture of the school itself, which is an extension of the bureaucracy. The current educational scene is fraught with innovations prescribed from above, although there is much lip service paid to teacher participation in curriculum development. A survey of elementary school teachers suggests that the multiplicity of teacher roles, the lack of adequate preparation, materials and other resources have made teachers regard such innovations as bureaucratic impositions. Yet since they are captives of the educational system too, they cannot help speaking the language of school bureaucracy.

Thus recitation, tests, grades, performance ratings, community development, official visitations, requirements, admission, passing, failing and graduating, problem-students, maladjustment are terms that have developed certain meanings for both teachers and students. Some of these have an anxiety-generating ambience. Students as well as teachers react to them with anxiety, if not outright hostility.

The following is a verbatim transcript of a protocol on an observation of an elementary class in a rural school.

The teahcer is in her forties, married, has acquired the necessary degree and has more than fifteen years of teaching service. This is a fifth grade class in social studies composed of twelve girls and nine boys, who are using seven workbooks and the teacher's remarks to learn their lessons. Mrs. Hindi Balikbayan teaches social studies to complete her load; actually she is a Home Economics major in charge of that department in the school. The activity is a review for the next day's fifth grading period test. It is supposed to be a socialized recitation on the commercial and economic development of the Philippines.

Teacher: Huwag nang babasahin ang notebook! Bukas na ang eksamen, eh! (Do not read your notes! Tomorrow will be your test.) Very easy. You can say it in your own word (to a boy who cannot answer a question raised by a classmate).

Teacher: O, magtanong na kayo! Ano ang gusto ninyong malaman? (Ask questions. What do you want to know?) Watch out! Watch out! Fifth grading is coming!

Pupil 1: Why did the Philippines become isolated with other countries?

Pupils answer collectively by reading their notes.

Teacher: In your own words! In your own words! You can say it in simple English! Pag wala na ang notebook wala na kayo. (When you have no notebooks to refer to, you are completely lost.) O ano ang

meaning ng isolated? (What does isolated mean?) O sige, sagutin! Ilang beses ko na ikinwento sa inyo, eh. (Answer! I have recounted it several times.)

Boy Pupil: Nag-iisa! (Alone!) Separated!

Teacher: What is the Galleon trade?

Class: I ma'm! I ma'm!

Boy Pupil: Trading between the Philippines and Acapulco!

Teacher: Tama! (Right!) For how many years did the Galleon trade lasted?

Class: I ma'm! I ma'm!

Teacher: Dinig tayo hanggang sa pre-fab. (We can be heard as far as the pre-fab, another school building located about one hundred feet away fromthis class.) Nardoon ba ako sa pre-fab? Ilang taon naging Dons at Donyas ang mga Sapniards? (Am I in the pre-fab? How long did the Spaniards lord it over us?)

Class: (Start to read collectively from notes.)

Teacher: Say your answers in your own words! In 1811 Ventura de los Reyes abolished the Galleon trade. The Galleon trade was abolished by Ventura de los Reyes in 1811. The man who abolished the Galleon trade in 1811 was?

Class: (In unison) Ventura de los Reyes!

Teacher: Ayan! Magaling! (That's it! Good!)

Class becomes noisy and teacher gets angry.

Teacher: Position! (Pupils sit up straight, keep quiet.)

Teacher: Who are the strangers in this barrio? (This is a Tagalog barrio.)

Girl Pupil: Ilokanos!

Teacher: Who else?

Boy Pupil: Meralco! (Meralco technicians are building an electric plant in the barrio.)

Teacher: Right! Mag-iingat kayo! Balang araw baka bilhin ng mga iyan ang lupa ninyo at kayong mga taga rito ay mawalan! Baka tratuhin tayo ng mga iyan ng tulad ng pagtrato sa atin ng mga Spaniards! Sabihin ninyo sa mga magulang ninyo mag-iingat! (Be careful. Someday they may buy your land! They might treat you the way the Spaniards treated us! Tell your parents to beware of these strangers!) What improvement did the Americans have done in our country?

(Pinches two boys for chatting.)

What was the best gift given to us by the Americans?

Class: I ma'm! I ma'm!

Teacher: Huwag naman kayong mag-I ma'm! Titigilan ko kayong turuan kung ganyan hindi ma-control. (Do not say 'I ma'm!' I shall stop teaching if you cannot be controlled!)

Boy Pupil: Education!

Teacher: How about the Spaniards?

Girl Pupil: The best gift given to us by the Spaniards is Christianity.

Teacher: Tama! Naging Christians tayo! Nagkaroon tayo ng Diyos! (Right! We became Christians! We acquired a God!) What was the first thing that Magellan did in the Philippines?

Boy Pupil: They planted a cross!

Teacher: What is the meaning of that?

Class: Love of God! Conquest! Respect for God!

Teacher explains responses in Tagalog. Bell rings. Class prepares to move to another room for the next subject.

Apart from the obsolete notions about our colonial inheritance other important messages have been communicated in this class: prejudice against and suspicion of, strangers and other linguistic groups, fear of periodical examinations, emphasis on the memorization of discrete facts, affirmation of teacher authority over pupil behavior, attachment to the land, a sense of private property, the right of adults to inflict physical punishment on the young.

It is not claimed that the foregoing is representative of all elementary classes in the country. It is intended to convey some idea of the language of the classroom and the implicit attitudes of senders and receivers of messages.

Unhappily, even mute buildings, locked faculty toilets, teacher-administrator interactions, the frantic preparations for official visits, the compulsory collection of small contributions - all of which are part of the school's activity, communicate messages that are repeatedly affirmed by the behavior of pupils, teachers, school heads, parents.

The heirarchical structure of educational authority and power, the function of the school as a fund-raising institution, as a kind of tourist spot for official visitors - these are some of the silent, if unintended messages of the school, which pupils absorb and to which they respond in the expected manner.

The language of the school is not a mere matter of words spoken or written in the classroom; it is found in its administrative structure, in its rites and ceremonies, in its schedule of daily activities, in its subjection to higher authority. Small wonder that in their system of meanings

teachers tend to think of textbooks and teaching guides as sacred objects (they are so scarce); of the curriculum as untouchable and holy (they may not innovate without proper approval) and of innovations as commands from the bureaucracy.

It is hypothesized that a similar situation prevails in other types of schools. What can linguistic experts do about changing the system, hopefully for the better? Certainly not by adhering closely to a narrow linguistic theory of an ideal speaker-listener in a homogeneous speech-community, but by understanding not only the sociolinguistic system but also its relevance to the language problems of minority groups handicapped by poverty, ethnicity or both. (Hymes 1971)

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